

*Erigeron annuus*

A friend gave me a miserable looking little plant that she didn't know the name of but which she insisted would grow into six foot of tiny, white daisies. She was right, by the end of the summer it was a positive cloud of white. The next year it did it again but produced no seedlings so I wondered how to propagate it. The following year we were digging them out of the beds, out of the paths, they were everywhere. Roy Lancaster finally identified it as *Erigeron annuus* (although it is not in the least annual).

**Height** 1-2m.

**Growing conditions** Sun.

**Hardiness** USDA 3.

**Origin** North America.

**Season of interest** July – October.



## August plants

There are so many great plants for high summer that it's hard to know where to start, but Derry has managed to narrow her choice to ten favourites

WORDS DERRY WATKINS PHOTOGRAPHS JASON INGRAM

**Derry Watkins** is the owner of Special Plants nursery near Bath. [specialplants.net](http://specialplants.net)



*Salvia greggii* 'Stormy Pink'

Around 15 years ago I found an accidental salvia seedling in my nursery. I grew it on, took cuttings and then, assuming it was tender, left it in the garden to die. Surprisingly, it is still there, not fazed in the slightest by our hardest winters. I cut it hard back to thick stems like bonsaied tree trunks every spring and it grows to around four feet every summer, blooming from June right through until October. I named it 'Stormy Pink' because of the grey calyx that appears behind each one of the creamy pink flowers.

**Height** 1m.

**Growing conditions** Sun and drainage.

**Hardiness** RHS H5, USDA 7.

**Origin** Seedling from Special Plants.

**Season of interest** June – October.



*Persicaria orientalis*

A madcap annual. Stout bamboo-like stems shoot up to five or six feet and then send out flower heads so laden with deep-pink flowers that they cascade down, a waterfall of pink. They look perfectly silly swaying in the wind. The common name of kiss-me-over-the-garden-gate is pretty silly as well. Even germinating it is silly. It is an annual which is hard to grow from seed (until you realise it has to be grown fresh and kept cold up until it begins to germinate), but can sow itself prolifically.

**Height** 1.5-1.8m.

**Growing conditions** Sun and good drainage.

**Hardiness** N/A, hardy annual.

**Origin** India.

**Season of interest** August – November.



*Lobelia x speciosa*  
'Hadspen Purple'

A perennial lobelia with the most glorious rich, deep-purple flowers. The colour sings out from across the garden. As a bonus the bright green foliage is often flushed purple. Bred by the Popes at Hadspen House, it is a strong grower and not a martyr to slugs like so many lobelias. It loves rich, damp soil and sun. It is worth pandering to its whims in order to get that late summer explosion of colour. Bees and butterflies love it, and so do I.

**Height** 70cm.

**Growing conditions** Good soil, not too dry, sun or light shade.

**Hardiness** USDA 5.

**Origin** Bred by Nori and Sandra Pope at Hadspen House in Somerset.

**Season of interest** July – August.





*Argyranthemum*  
'Levada Cream'

Until recently this was called 'Jamaica Primrose'. In a recent RHS trial, it was renamed 'Levada Cream'. Apparently, the original 'Jamaica Primrose' had a deeper yellow flower and a greyer leaf. Whatever its name, it is the biggest, fastest growing, most floriferous of argyranthemums. Each plant will be a 90cm x 90cm mound of big, pale-yellow daisies, in bloom from June through October without hesitation or deviation. It is tender and gets too big to take inside, but cuttings are ridiculously easy to root and can be overwintered.

**Height** 90cm.  
**Growing conditions** Full sun.  
**Hardiness** RHS H2, USDA 9.  
**Origin** Canary Islands.  
**Season of interest** June – October.



*Thalictrum delavayi* 'Album'

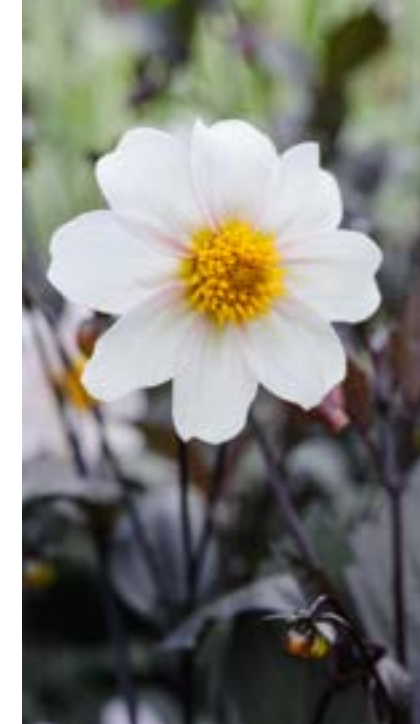
An elegant, pure white version of *Thalictrum delavayi*, its delicate maidenhair-fern-like leaves are a brighter green than the species. The airy foliage is delightful on its own, but then in July the whole plant is sprinkled with little round buds like pearls, which open out into ballerina skirts, the pure white petals flaring to reveal a cluster of pale cream anthers. In midsummer when everything else is starting to look a bit tired this remains as fresh and crisp as a May morning.

**Height** 1.3m.  
**Growing conditions** Sun or light shade. Good soil. Will need staking in shade.  
**Hardiness** RHS H7.  
**Origin** China.  
**Season of interest** July – August.

*Dahlia* 'Twynning's After Eight'

I like dark-leaved dahlias, especially this one, with creamy white flowers in spectacular contrast to its leaves. You can almost taste the icy mint and bittersweet chocolate. It is vigorous and tough, surviving winter after winter in my garden, in flower from July through October. Even the seedheads are attractive – shiny, dark and pointed. It doesn't need much staking, but it does grow big, probably 1.2m x 1.2m. Dark leaves can seem sombre but the simple white flowers keep this one ever cheerful. AGM.

**Height** 1.2m.  
**Growing conditions** Full sun, good soil, mulch in winter, or lift tuber and store in frost-free conditions.  
**Hardiness** RHS H3, USDA 8.  
**Origin** Bred by Mark Twynning in UK.  
**Season of interest** July – October.



*Cautleya spicata* 'Robusta'

A ginger relative, *Cautleya spicata*, looks tropical but isn't. Late to emerge, in June the sturdy dark red stems sprout tropical looking leaves rather like a canna. By August each stem is tipped with dark-red buds from which come brilliant yellow curved flowers like a cross between a salvia and an orchid. The flowers open over a period of several weeks. A month later the dark-red seedpods split open to reveal what look like gobs of cuckoo spit hiding the little black seeds.

**Height** 1m.  
**Growing conditions** Moist, humus-rich soil, light shade. Plant the thick rhizomes about 10cm deep and mulch in winter.  
**Hardiness** USDA 7 if mulched.  
**Origin** Himalayas.  
**Season of interest** July – October.



*Indigofera pendula*

Perhaps the most beautiful flowers of any shrub. Indigoferas are in the pea family and most of them produce masses of tiny pink flowers on this year's growth so they are pruned hard every spring, sending out vigorous young shoots smothered in flowers in mid-summer. *Indigofera pendula* does that, but as the name suggests, the shoots are pendulous – long slender racemes of pink flowers with tiny lavender-grey buds cascading down like wisteria. The old stems need some support to prevent them cascading down as well.

**Height** 2m.  
**Growing conditions** Sun, good drainage, not too windy.  
**Hardiness** RHS H5, USDA 7.  
**Origin** China.  
**Season of interest** July – August.

*Verbena officinalis* var.  
*grandiflora* 'Bampton'

A dark-purple-leaved form of an English native, the leaves get darker and darker as the year goes on. Unlike many dark-leaved plants, this one catches the light. The fine, purple leaves on their thin stems seem to shimmer. Loose heads of tiny pink flowers are like a mist over the whole plant. Looks wonderful on its own against pale gravel, but might disappear on dark soil or planted in among other plants. Found in the village of Bampton, Devon, where it had been self-seeding.

**Height** 75cm.  
**Growing conditions** Sun and drainage.  
**Hardiness** RHS H7, USDA 4.  
**Origin** UK.  
**Season of interest** July – November.



## Places to visit

Derry shares some of her favourite places to see plants at their best.

**Great Comp Garden** in Kent is one of the most romantic and a lusciously planted gardens in the UK. Set around a 17th-century farmhouse, it was created over a period of 20 years by Roderick (Eric) and Joy Compton who bought the house in the 1950s. In spring there are magnificent magnolias, azaleas and rhododendrons, but the joy of it for me is high summer



PLANTOGRAPHY/ALAMY

Great Comp Garden

when it is bursting with salvias, dahlias and cannas – fireworks of colour. And there's one of the best salvia nurseries in the country right on site. Great Comp Garden, Comp Lane, Platt, Sevenoaks, Kent TN15 8QS. Tel 01732 885094, greatcomparden.co.uk. Open daily, 11am-5pm, 1 April – 31 October.

**Dove Cottage Nursery** is perhaps my favourite

nursery. Tucked away in a post-industrial bit of West Yorkshire, it is a shining example of great growing combined with a connoisseur's eye for a great plant. The adjoining garden is small but perfectly formed. Unusual plant combinations flow down the slope mingling and interweaving, hiding and then revealing details you never noticed before,

teasing the eye into appreciating the plants from every angle. Shibden Hall Rd, Halifax, West Yorkshire HX3 9XA. Tel 01422 203553, dovecottagenursery.co.uk. Open Wednesdays-Saturdays, 10am-5pm, 4 June – 27 September.

**Sussex Prairies** is a grass garden on a mammoth scale. Big bold sweeps of grasses and well-chosen late summer



MARJAN MAJERUS, PAUL AND PAULINE MCBRIDE

Sussex Prairies

perennials swirl across a six-acre field, drawing you further and further in to explore what is around the next corner. Rusty iron buffaloes trek through the prairie, a reminder of the American origin of many of the plants. Morlands Farm, Wheatshaf Road, Woodmancote, West Sussex BN5 9AT. Tel 01273 495902, sussexprairies.co.uk. Open 1pm-5pm, 31 May – 12 October.